
Appendix C: Save Our Rail Response to HDC Report

Appendix prepared by Save Our Rail NSW Inc. – July 2009

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--: an appendix to :--

NEWCASTLE Towards a Sustainable and Vibrant City

A Proposal for CBD Integration

Prepared by Save Our Rail NSW Inc. – December 2008



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Executive Summary

Save Our Rail (SOR) is not opposed to development and would generally support the list of “strengths and emerging opportunities in Newcastle.”

- SOR would support the expansion of the University of Newcastle into the city – with the rail retained – as it would be a positive initiative and would generate life in the CBD.
- A cruise ship terminal and conference facilities would be beneficial. Situated near Queens Wharf as proposed, the terminal would be ideally placed beside the rail – similar to San Diego.
- Heritage protection and tourism go hand in hand, and Newcastle Station is a working heritage item.
- SOR and cycle groups do not support the removal of the rail line nor the corridor’s use as a cycleway. A superior cycleway exists along the waterfront and Honeysuckle Drive. Cycleways development is a green initiative which should be supported in the light of fuel shortage and climate change – but not at the expense of the rail. Cycle enthusiasts use trains which can readily accommodate their bikes.
- Save Our Rail supports the General Property Trust redevelopment of the Hunter Street Mall, which can and should proceed with the rail line retained. This is evident in our proposal in which Newcastle Station gains access via ramps at the western end and includes the building of a new Harbourlink Station near David Jones. These proposals would assist in the north-south access provision as well as providing particular convenience to mall customers. It is inconceivable that the GPT project should be dependent on removal of a major transport link, which provides benefit to the city as well as to any future retail development

However, as Save Our Rail is a volunteer group acting on behalf of those in the community who use and need the public transport option of rail, **we cannot support and would resist the main thrust of the HDC report which indicates an aim to close the Newcastle Rail Line** at the behest of developers. **This aim lacks adequate reason or justification. Indeed the report seems to create reasons for such a closure, by exaggeration, inference, distortion of fact, misrepresentation and omission.**

For example, the SOR proposal for a rail viaduct is costed inaccurately in the HDC Report. It indicates a presumption that the proposal was for the whole line to be raised, when it was for one section only.

Similarly the Newcastle Transport for Business Development (NTBD) group’s proposal for a Tram-Train was dealt with as though it was for a heavy rail train modification as previously proposed by the Hunter Business Chamber. This was a very different proposal and the NTBD for technologically advanced Tram-Trains was rejected without consideration on inappropriate grounds.

The Cost Benefit Analysis was flawed through the application of inaccurate costings. This gives a misleading result leading to incorrect advice.

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The biggest flaw is the misrepresentation that development of the University of Newcastle's CBD campus is contingent on the removal of the rail into Newcastle. This falsehood has been exposed in writing by the Vice Chancellor of the University. This misrepresentation allowed HDC to claim the removal of the rail line was economically preferable, when in fact HDC's own figures indicate retaining the rail to Newcastle is the economically superior option

The report does not adequately consider the value of existing infrastructure and in cavalier fashion proposes to spend 'infrastructure' funding to destroy 'infrastructure'. In a bizarre misinterpretation of 'integration' it promotes the 'disintegration' of Newcastle City by cutting it off from regional connections and from the NSW capital, as well as causing 'disintegration' of the modes of transport by separation from the existing ferry service. **The word 'integration' instead of 'access' is used to justify cutting the rail line when the crying need is for the replacement of crossings over it to allow for easy 'access' between the harbour and traditional retail strip, therefore better 'integrating' the city.**

Wasting of approximately \$650million to destroy the existing most sustainable mass transit option into Newcastle would be a cruel irony, when there are other positive transport needs in the region that could justify this sort of expenditure. These include the Glendale Interchange, lifts at Cardiff, better access to some Maitland stations, the return of rail services to Cessnock, additional train services to Singleton, the provision of light rail to re-use defunct rail lines to Wallsend and the University and the possibility of future light rail links to Merewether or to the Newcastle Airport.

Save Our Rail does not consider this report to be well researched or referenced and the flawed economic analysis uses gross misrepresentation and underestimates to apparently achieve a desired conclusion.

Any possibility of achieving future Federal funding for the Hunter Region will require quality submissions using appropriate expertise and a greater degree of accuracy than is evident in the HDC report. The current world situations of looming oil shortage, financial instability and climate change demand more emphasis on the need for Transit Oriented Developments as defined by Prof. Peter Newman,¹ who advocates for development around existing rail lines.

Save Our Rail urges the NSW Government to consider other options, including the December 2008 Save Our Rail Proposal, and to use consultants with transport expertise before making decisions regarding the removal of transport infrastructure, which could adversely affect Newcastle and the entire the Hunter Region.

¹ Prof Peter Newman, "Fast rail best way ahead," The Australian, 30/10/08

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--:: an appendix to ::--

NEWCASTLE – Towards a Sustainable and Vibrant City

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This document builds upon two earlier Save Our Rail documents: the December 2008 proposal for CBD integration "Newcastle – Towards a Sustainable and Vibrant City" and the January 2009 review of GPT's Wickham terminus proposal "Appendix B: Critical Appraisal of GPT Proposal" (much of which is directly applicable to the current HDC report).

Background

The NSW Government in October 2008 was faced with an ultimatum by developer General Property Trust (GPT) which demanded the closure of Newcastle Rail Line as a condition of its retail/residential development proposal. The Government, via local member Jodi McKay, handed responsibility for preparing a report on the issue to the Hunter Development Corporation (HDC). As HDC is a Government instrumentality this could be seen as asking oneself for advice.

Save Our Rail contends that HDC cannot be viewed as impartial. HDC evolved from the Honeysuckle Corporation, which had a "closed rail corridor from Civic to Newcastle Station" as one of the key elements in its approved scheme.² NSW Government documents indicate that the re-badged HDC has the same charter as Honeysuckle (to cut the line).^{3, 4} Indeed, the corporation recommending the closure of the Newcastle rail line will profit from any commercial development of the rail corridor.⁵

Irrespective of any DCP approved by Newcastle City Council and the State Government, the HDC Board seems to continue to pursue an aim of cutting the rail line.

² Honeysuckle Development Corporation (HDC), "Honeysuckle Newcastle - The Scheme", March 1993, Section 8.2, "Key Elements of the Concept Masterplan", p7

³ NSW Government Gazette, No. 9, p82-84, "Growth Centres (Hunter Development Corporation) Order 2008", 18/01/2008; clause 5 states: "For the avoidance of doubt, the Hunter Development Corporation is the continuation of, and is the same legal entity as, the Honeysuckle Development Corporation constituted under the Growth Centres (Honeysuckle Development Corporation) Order 1992."

⁴ NSW Government, "Growth Centres (Development Corporations) Act 1974", Reprint No 7, 02/01/2009

⁵ Hunter Development Corporation, "Newcastle City Centre Renewal Report to NSW Government", March 2009, p87; quotation: "Removing the rail line through Honeysuckle precinct would create even more land use and urban design opportunities to use the corridor for other purposes and to develop sites abutting the corridor."

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Lower Hunter Transport Working Group

A series of reports was produced in 2003 for the then NSW Transport Minister, Michael Costa, recommending the closure of the Newcastle Rail Line at Broadmeadow. The group charged with preparing the reports was the Lower Hunter Transport Working Group (LHTWG).

Newcastle City Council engaged independent expert Professor Graham Currie (Chair of Public Transport, Institute of Transport Studies, Monash University) to review the reports produced by the LHTWG.⁶ He wrote that **the LHTWG reports were limited in meeting their terms of reference; displayed a bias to rail closure; and despite claims that their focus was improving public transport, no options to improve services to passengers were considered.**

Professor Currie concluded his review with these remarks:

“...it is clear that an assessment of the facts presented suggests that rail closure was favoured in the analysis and that wider options were not objectively considered. In addition there are significant errors, misrepresentations and omissions in the technical work. It is at least highly suspicious that in almost every case these act to make rail closure seem more attractive and retaining the line less attractive. ... This reviewer is surprised at the minimalist level of analysis displayed in the work presented.

The passenger rail services in the Hunter region are a high quality feature of the regions public transport system. Many cities of substantially greater size than Newcastle lack rail services of this scale and would covet the opportunity for such a substantive resource as a means for providing sustainable transport into the future. Newcastle is clearly gifted in the physical and natural resources it possesses. It is unfortunate that its sustainable transport system is to be discarded so easily based what can be factually identified as biased, flawed and misrepresented advice.”

In reference to the GHD economic research in the LHTWG reports Prof Currie was critical as follows:

“Overall the approach used to estimate economic benefits is invalid. Secondary data is falsely represented and invalid and misleading assumptions adopted. The negative implications on accessibility of rail closure are not considered.

There is no consideration of CBD parking demand impacts of rail closure in the work. Impacts on CBD traffic congestion are also ignored. The impact of congestion on the attractiveness of Newcastle CBD compared to out of town destinations is not considered.

The report does not consider longer term impacts of increased car ownership and hence traffic congestion in the region. This is an important issue since it is clear that congestion is already a concern of the Newcastle Peninsula and that there are parking issues in the area.

⁶ Prof Graham Currie, “Decision to Close the Newcastle Branch Rail Line - Independent Review of Transport Reports”, November 2005

HDC, in 2009, consulted with Parsons Brinckerhoff (PB) who undertook “a rapid, strategic appraisal drawing on extensive detailed transport work undertaken previously”.⁷ They used the same economic report⁸ slammed by Professor Currie.

Professor Currie also pointed to negative regional implications of closing the Newcastle line, which are being ignored by HDC:

*“Finally the report does not consider the longer term impact of branch line closure on the Hunter Region passenger rail service in total. With the substantial patronage decline which is likely to result it is quite likely that the viability of the Hunter Line and the North Coast line may be questionable when the branch line is closed. **The Newcastle CBD stations are clearly the most important parts of the Hunter rail system. Cutting off the ‘head’ can often have severe implications for the ‘body’ of the rail system. If the Hunter passenger rail system were to close it would have significant wider economic impacts on the region which are not considered in the consultant report.**”*

The critical conclusions drawn by Professor Currie (regarding the LHTWG reports) could be applied to the transport aspects of 2009 reports from HDC which include “**biased, flawed and misrepresented advice**”.

For an explanation of the bias we need look no further than the members of the LHTWG in 2003 and see where they are now in relation to HDC. The LHTWG comprised:⁹

- Dr Bill Dunbar, Executive Director, Infrastructure Coordination Unit, DIPNR (Chair);
- Gary Kennedy, Secretary, Newcastle Trades Hall Council;
- John Tate, Lord Mayor, City of Newcastle;
- Glenn Thornton, Chief Executive, Hunter Business Chamber.

Apart from the Chair, all members of the working group were directors of the Honeysuckle Development Corporation (the predecessor to the current HDC).

In 2009, Mr Kennedy and Mr Tate remain directors of HDC, while Mr Thornton is now CEO of Parsons Brinckerhoff (PB), a major consultant HDC commissioned for the transport study¹⁰ which Save Our Rail identifies as biased, flawed, and a misrepresentation.

The Hunter Development Corporation’s desire to reduce the Newcastle Rail Line remains.

In 2005 the decision to cut the Newcastle Rail Line based on the LHTWG recommendation was reversed, and a subsequent proposal for a “modified light rail” system by the Hunter Business Chamber (with heavy rail terminating at Warabrook) was also rejected by the NSW Government following advice from consultants WorleyParsons.

⁷ Parsons Brinckerhoff, “Newcastle CBD Integrated Transport Identification of Preferred Scheme” (for HDC), March 2009, p(iii)

⁸ GHD, “Economic Impact of Rail Closure in Newcastle”, November 2004

⁹ “Lower Hunter Transport Working Group - First Report”, 19 September 2003, p9

¹⁰ Parsons Brinckerhoff, “Newcastle CBD Integrated Transport Identification of Preferred Scheme” (for HDC), March 2009

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Value of rail in Newcastle

Metropolitan Transport Forum (MTF) (Melbourne) Chair Cr Jackie Fristacky said **“Rail provides capacity, certainty and priority – it attracts patronage and encourages economic development far beyond what buses can achieve”**.¹¹

Prof Peter Newman, Curtin University, internationally recognised as an authority on transport and sustainability has advised the business community of Newcastle on several occasions stating:¹²

“In Newcastle the suggestion has been made that business will be better off if buses replace rail, and if the rail land dividing the city from the water is linked and developed. Such sentiments build on a belief that public transport is only a social agenda and does nothing for business. I want to show that nothing can be further from the truth.... Recent studies in the US confirm that rail systems attract business and improve land values – 23% higher near light rail lines and 120% near heavy rail.”

Prof Newman compared Newcastle with Fremantle, which has similar geography and also had the need to recreate itself following the demise of industry. He concludes:

“Newcastle needs a rail link to its very heart... the city needs a new vision for how it can provide both access and development opportunities... Business needs to forge a new partnership with the community because rail is an essential part of a viable city centre.”

The authors of the HDC report and earlier LHTWG reports inappropriately assign the presence of heavy rail into the heart of Newcastle as the reason for the decline of the CBD as a retail hub.

Decline of the Newcastle CBD

The historical documentation by Robert McKillop and David Sheedy¹³ gives a different perspective, quoting American historian, Lewis Mumford as follows:

“As soon as the motor car became common, the pedestrian scale of the suburb disappeared, and with it most of the individuality and charm... Under the present urban regime, every urban function follows the example of the motor road: it devours space and consumes time with the increasing friction and frustration, while under the plausible pretext of increasing the range of speed and communication, it actually obstructs it and denies the possibility of easy meetings by scattering the fragments of the city at random over a whole region.”

The authors go on to state:

“As elsewhere, the impact of the motorcar on Newcastle was a rapid shift from public transport that served the community at large, to the private car

¹¹ Chair Cr Jackie Fristacky, Metropolitan Transport Forum (MTF), at Melbourne University, November 2008

¹² P. Newman, “It’s not tunnel vision: rail means business”, Newcastle Herald, 20/4/05

¹³ R. McKillop and D. Sheedy, “Our Region, Our Railway, The Hunter and the Great Northern Railway 1857 – 2007”, Australian Railway Historical Society, 2008, p157-158.

available only to its owner and his or her immediate circle. Every aspect of commercial and social life was affected by the mobility afforded by the private car... Residents flocked to regional shopping centres dependent on cars for access, leading to stagnation in the Newcastle central business district. The creation of the Hunter Street Mall in 1980 failed to stem the tide.”

McKillop and Sheedy cite the loss of jobs in heavy industries with the closure of the State Dockyard in 1987, the closing of the BHP steelworks in 1999 and the consequent loss of associated industrial plants. Finally they point to the factor of the earthquake as follows:

“The optimism of the area was shattered on 28 December, 1989 when Newcastle was hit by a severe earthquake that cost the lives of 13 people and severely damaged and estimated 60,000 buildings. The inner city was most affected and much of it had to be closed off while buildings were made safe.”

During the period of closure shopping and service habits were changed irrevocably, and as with the Newcastle Workers’ Club which never recovered its former patronage, people turned elsewhere and developed new retail loyalties and associations.

The HDC report says *“the heavy rail line is an obstacle to achieving the vision of the City Centre Plan... prevents effective integration of the successful Honeysuckle redevelopment and the CBD... thus detracting from the commercial attractiveness of the CBD to private investment.”*

The previous paragraphs give some of the reasons for the failure of the Newcastle CBD to attract developers, but there are other reasons, which were identified in the workshops conducted by Key Insights, commissioned by the Task Force in 2008. They include:

- Mine subsidence is a major deterrent to investment in many parts of Newcastle, with construction above 10 storeys requiring grouting of old mineshafts. A 12 storey building therefore becomes very costly.
- The need to amalgamate sites – the need for car parking space provision means many sites are too small and therefore there needs to be amalgamation to be commercially viable.
- Council and State regulations are factors. Developers have not proceeded with some projects because of impediments arising from Council and State regulations and decisions.

GPT proposal

GPT opposes the relocation of the legal precinct from its present location in the east end of Newcastle. This is because there is a need for a “critical mass” of population to support their proposed retail development. This degree of critical mass cannot be achieved with residential occupation alone, and requires the higher population density achieved in workplaces. The average occupancy of an apartment for a given area is much lower than for commercial premises.

GPT has factored in some University of Newcastle facilities near the supposedly closed Newcastle Station. This would assist in creating the critical mass required.

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Save Our Rail is on the record as supporting the GPT proposal for the Hunter Street Mall, but opposes its demand for the rail to be cut at Wickham. Save Our Rail believes only rail will have the capacity to meet the needs of the required higher urban density. Mass transit needs cannot be met by bus and private motor vehicle. It seems incomprehensible that a developer wanting to establish a major retail complex would require the removal of the transport mode which could best supply the future customers and workers.

Federal funding

Any possibility of achieving future Federal funding for the Hunter Region will require quality submissions using appropriate expertise and a greater degree of accuracy than is evident in the HDC report. The current world situations of looming oil shortage, financial instability and climate change demand more emphasis on the need for Transit Oriented Developments as defined by Prof. Peter Newman,¹⁴ who advocates for development around existing rail lines.

In relation to the quality of submissions being put forward for Federal infrastructure funding *“the Prime Minister warned he was not prepared to invest ‘billions’ of dollars in Sydney projects until the NSW Government got the planning right.”*¹⁵

Save Our Rail understands that the original HDC report was returned by the NSW Government because of a discrepancy in cost estimates. This indicates the lack of quality in the HDC report.

Because we have identified many inaccuracies and biased material in the HDC reports **we have a real concern that if this report is the basis for a submission to the Federal Government, this region will miss out on gaining funding for much needed infrastructure.**

Misrepresentation

The HDC report seems to be applying all means possible, including inference and misrepresentation of flawed data, to achieve the goal of justifying a termination of the rail at Wickham. Following are examples of a degree of opportunism toward this end.

History of Newcastle Rail Line

HDC state that their criticism of the rail line is justified by their claim that its alignment was chosen for freight use.¹⁶ **This is untrue.** Even their illustration is misleading as it shows the area that is now the Foreshore Park, an area of no relevance to present north-south CBD connectivity issues.

Newcastle railway line, formerly called the Great Northern Railway (GNR) **has always been a passenger rail service.** It ran as a “mixed train” carrying goods and passengers. Coal was carried on separate railway lines to the port, privately owned by the coal companies.

¹⁴ Prof Peter Newman, “Fast rail best way ahead”, The Australian, 30/10/08

¹⁵ Simon Benson, “Budget punishes NSW for the dismal state we’re in”, Daily Telegraph, 14/05/09

¹⁶ Hunter Development Corporation, “Newcastle City Centre Renewal Report to NSW Government”, March 2009, p57

*“In its first year of operation (1857), the GNR carried 29,449 passengers... and only 1,590 tons of goods. In contrast, the three private colliery railways transporting coal to the wharfs at Newcastle and Hexham – those of the AA Company, the NC&C Company, and John Eales – moved 145,551 tons of coal that year.”*¹⁷

*“The expediency of making the temporary terminus at Honeysuckle Point [west of Civic] had not been well received by Newcastle residents, who agitated for an extension into the centre of the town from an early date. ... The extension to Newcastle Station [in its present location] was opened for public use on Saturday 20 March 1858”*¹⁸

Over 150 years ago, **our forefathers did not consider a rail terminus west of the city centre to be satisfactory.** Then, as today, such a terminus is not well received.

Lower Hunter Regional Strategy

The Lower Hunter Regional Strategy stressed the importance of Newcastle as the region’s Major City. This is indicated by the use of regional cultural facilities such as the Region Art Gallery, Region Library, the Civic Theatre and Newcastle Town Hall as well as being a centre for legal services and specialist medical services, specialist retail outlets and as a hub for youth activities at the Loft Youth Venue and the Brewery at Queens Wharf. The city with its beaches accessible from the rail line is also a magnet for the surfing culture, particularly from the inland towns.

It has been previously stated by Prof Currie and in the Kellog Brown Root report¹⁹ that *“...any removal of the heavy rail line toward Woodville Junction would mean that preservation of the CBD’s role as the regional centre would be compromised. ... With enforced interchange... the CBD is no longer as attractive and customers would increasingly look for alternate destinations... The result of this would be the further proliferation of competing shopping areas at the expense of the CBD. This would inevitably erode the role of the CBD as the primary regional centre”.* **This argument is valid for a terminus at Wickham.**

Newcastle City Centre Plan

HDC claims the strategy set out in its report is consistent with the Newcastle City Centre Plan²⁰ however for no apparent reason it selectively changes the plan’s intent to one of closing the rail line.

The Newcastle City Centre Plan advocated for crossings over the rail line, not for closure.

¹⁷ Robert McKillop and David Sheedy, “Our Region, Our Railway – The Hunter and the Great Northern Railway, 1857 – 2007”, p27

¹⁸ Robert McKillop and David Sheedy, “Our Region, Our Railway – The Hunter and the Great Northern Railway, 1857 – 2007”, p21-22

¹⁹ Kellog Brown Root, “Central Newcastle Transport Options Planning Study”, commissioned by NSW Government, Oct 2003, p3.3

²⁰ Hunter Development Corporation, “Newcastle City Centre Renewal Report to NSW Government”, March 2009, p9

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NTBD Tram-Train proposal

The Newcastle Transport for Business Development (NTBD) Tram-Train proposal was overlooked in the HDC report.²¹ Reasons for not accepting the concept of light rail in the HDC report appear to indicate inadequate reading of the NTBD proposal as the report mindlessly quotes reasons given by WorleyParsons in discrediting the Hunter Business Chamber Modified Heavy Rail Warabrook proposal. The HBC idea was a totally different type of light rail application; it was attempting to modify heavy rail vehicles. **The reasons for its rejection are completely irrelevant to the technically advanced NTBD proposal which is modelled on existing overseas operations. None of the technical problems identified by WorleyParsons are applicable to the NTBD submission.**

NTBD did not advocate terminating the heavy rail. Their proposal was based on providing infrastructure and rolling stock of an equivalent cost as an alternative to that proposed by GPT in cutting the line. Such a cut would mean relocating heavy rail infrastructure and terminal facilities and by consequence would require additional infrastructure for any future addition of light rail. (The spare capacity exists at Newcastle Station for light rail addition). The NTBD proposal would create improvement to passenger transport whereas any reduction of the line and interchange at Wickham would cause passenger inconvenience and disadvantage.

Viaduct proposed by Save Our Rail

The Stewart Avenue viaduct as proposed in the Save Our Rail submission is for a section of the Newcastle Line only. It would eliminate two level crossings, Railway Street and Stewart Avenue, which could be “traded” for two relocated pedestrian level crossings at Steel Street and Worth Place.

** These would be additional to the five historical crossings which have been removed from the Newcastle Line. SOR, using the RailCorp guidelines,²² seeks for the replacement by relocation of these five crossings in order to allow the needs of the community to be met.*

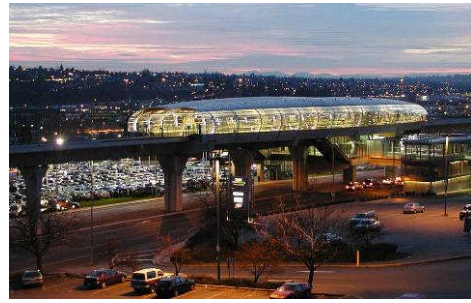
The viaduct provision, costing far less than the removal of the rail and the consequent need for a replacement terminal, would create a significant change in the north-south access between the traditional Hunter Street retail strip and the newly placed commercial premises.

This section of raised line has been costed in the HDC report as though it is for the entire Newcastle Line, indicated by the mentioning costs for “stations” (plural) when the proposal is for a single elevated station at Wickham. The cost estimate of \$120 million (option 3) seems excessive compared to the Elevated Wickham Terminus (option 7), necessarily more complicated than a non-terminus station costed at an estimated \$45 million. The proposed viaduct was for a length of approximately 1.3 km, starting at ground level east of Selma Street, rising for 270 metres to Railway Street, continuing at full height (5m clearance – slightly higher than existing power cables) for 560 metres to Hannell Street, then falling for 270 metres returning to ground level west of Steel Street. Note the gradient is less for the western rise, due to downward incline between Hamilton and Wickham.

²¹ Newcastle Transport For Business Development, “Introduction to the Lower Hunter Tram-Train Network”, revised submission to HDC, 23/02/2009

²² Rail Infrastructure Corporation, “Policy for Installing, Relocating, Removing and Changing the Configuration of Level Crossings”, August 2001

A raised rail, in the form of a viaduct, as envisaged in the Save Our Rail Proposal could be provided at relatively low cost, compared to a road overpass requiring purchase of property, some with heritage issues and involving a large space. A rail carrying viaduct, which would be placed above the existing corridor land, needs no land acquisition and could be an attractive gateway feature for the inner city precinct; it could become as much a feature and drawcard as the Vancouver Sky Train (as shown), while resolving some of the access problems associated with the Newcastle CBD.



The points made on page 45 of the HDC report require comment:

- ❖ *This option reinforces the rail in the wrong place*

The “wrong place” is an opinion without basis. See points further in this document regarding placement of new development.

- ❖ *The cost is prohibitively high as compared to benefit.*

The Parsons Brinckerhoff cost estimate is grossly inaccurate as indicated below. The Cost Benefit Analysis (CBA) is therefore also skewed, as expanded later in this document (misrepresentation by omission of benefits arising from University CBD campus). The Honeysuckle precinct needs improved access. Is it not worth it?

- ❖ *The opportunity cost for other CBD projects does not warrant this expense.*

What is not warranted is to take out a necessary and sustainable rail line to benefit developer need at the expense of the community. Further **the whole economic basis of the calculations by Parsons Brinckerhoff is flawed through misrepresentation**, as explored further on in this document, with rail proving to be the superior economic choice.

- ❖ *Patronage levels for the rail network would not be improved.*

Patronage levels will **certainly decrease** if a forced interchange is introduced. If the rail remains uninterrupted patronage is likely to increase in the future with the need for car alternatives. Rail has this necessary capacity for a patronage increase. The viaduct proposal is aimed at increasing connectivity, and has no relevance to patronage, though the entire SOR proposal would encourage and allow increased patronage.

- ❖ *The structure would create an intrusive visual barrier between the city and harbour and undermine the quality of the urban fabric of the city.*

Has the writer looked at the visual effect of the new Honeysuckle office buildings? It is hard to imagine anyone living in this city making this statement. Many Newcastle residents are not favourably impressed with the “concrete barrier” effect of the Honeysuckle buildings. The rail line is barely visible, it is as stated in the WorleyParsons report, “in a trench” between buildings for most of its length. **The proposed graceful structure would not greatly affect views but would certainly provide beneficial north-south access, eliminating two level crossings.** The Save

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Our Rail proposal would provide “*the opportunity for a Gateway Station... looking to the water and civic precinct, facilitating development at Wickham*”²³

The viaduct would be non-intrusive, being mostly behind existing buildings. If one stands on the Hunter Street corner, the view under and over the imagined structure remains (defined by the existing cable) and you can still see the top of the wheat silos!

❖ *Noise vibration and safety problems would persist.*

Noise vibration occurs in various situations. **Rail lines have benefits which outweigh the noise level disadvantage. Development consent regulations stipulate that certain “noise or vibration mitigation measures” be undertaken near rail lines.**

Buses also create noise, as do trucks. People who live on major road arteries adjust to this, installing double glazing and taking other measures. This type of noise is often more variable and disruptive than train noise. Industries such as the coal loaders on Kooragang Island cause continuous noise for the residents of Stockton and Mayfield but it is not suggested that the coal loaders be dismantled, even though the residents also get a load of coal dust when the westerly winds blow.

To separate the road and rail at Stewart Avenue would allow for a **much improved safety level**, as this is the most heavily used level crossing in Newcastle.²⁴ Pedestrians would be able to use the lifts to avoid having to cross the road, and any danger of cars being caught on the line, in heavy traffic times would be totally eliminated.

❖ *A solid structure would exacerbate flooding issues in the CBD.*

The structure is not envisaged as “solid,” in fact it would be quite fragile in appearance. Raising any part of the Newcastle Line would have to be considered as a flood mitigation measure, since the Wickham Station and surrounds were totally inundated in the June 2007 storm. This is one reason SOR proposed raising the line rather than lowering it to create the road/rail separation. All inner Newcastle has a flood risk, causing recent insurance premium increases.

❖ *Significant technical, access and cost implications of having elevated platforms*

Only one elevated station, Wickham, with an island platform, is proposed by SOR, with modest cost implications as stated, which would be far less than for the GPT proposal, supported by HDC, to build a large interchange. **Improved north-south access is the reason for the proposal.** As in the SOR proposal “lifts and stairs either side of Stewart Avenue” would provide disability access to the platform.

The proposal, aside from lower initial cost, would provide for cost offsets as follows:

- Under-rail space usage – two levels of car parking and/or warehouse space adjacent to the commercial office buildings. **This could be sold for immediate profit or used as a revenue stream.**

²³ Hunter Development Corporation, “Newcastle City Centre Renewal Report to NSW Government”, March 2009, p86

²⁴ RTA 2004 Permanent Count Stations, quoted in WorleyParsons report on Warabrook Proposal, 23/5/07

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- Allow closure of the Wickham signal box. **This would create a reduction in future signalling upgrade costs, a reduction in annual signal operating costs and a reduction in capital costs for level crossing signals.**

❖ *Significant delivery/construction impacts on existing services and operation of the adjoining precincts.*

Any major construction causes disruption however **the SOR proposal for a viaduct** to separate the road and rail at Stewart Avenue **brings transport benefit**, especially to road users. The HDC proposal for a \$650 million terminus, considered to be unnecessary, provides no public transport benefit and would disadvantage passengers and motorists (by way of traffic and parking problems).

Level crossing “policy”

There is no RailCorp policy forbidding new level crossings.

The HDC report superficially eliminates retaining the rail at-grade with new level crossings (as proposed by SOR) on the Newcastle rail line, citing “current NSW Government policy”.²⁵ **This is misrepresented in the HDC report.**

The “policy” is put forward as a reason to reject the SOR proposal for level crossings. The proposed level pedestrian crossings are in the manner of *replacements* for those previously removed and are needed in Newcastle to connect the two city precincts, the new office buildings and the older retail area.

The following is a summary by Geoff Dawson²⁶ of the facts surrounding level crossings:²⁷

There is no general prohibition on new level crossings. Evaluating proposals should consider costs and benefits in the circumstances of the case.

New level crossings in Newcastle City are highly desirable in order to reduce the ‘railway barrier’ problem between the Central Business District and the waterfront redevelopment area.

There is no RailCorp policy forbidding new level crossings under any circumstances (as is sometimes claimed). The relevant policy is Policy for Installing, Relocating, Removing and Changing the Configuration of Level Crossings (Rail Infrastructure Corporation, August 2001).

*The general policy is to minimise the number of crossings. However the policy recognises that in some cases community expectations or the cost of alternatives may conflict with this aim, and therefore **it is not practical to prohibit new crossings entirely. Proposals are considered where ‘no reasonable alternative is available’**, subject to a risk assessment.*

Risk at crossings with automatically operating gates is minimal.

²⁵ Hunter Development Corporation, “Newcastle City Centre Renewal Report to NSW Government”, March 2009, p46

²⁶ No relation to Save Our Rail president Joan Dawson

²⁷ Geoff Dawson, “Risk Assessment Of Newcastle Level Crossings”, June 2006; Included as Appendix C in NTBD revised submission to HDC, 23/02/2009.

Appendix C: Save Our Rail Response to HDC Report

The Newcastle community is entitled to seek the benefits of improved access to the foreshore. It is entitled to conclude that the benefits of new crossings outweigh the risks. **The call for level crossings has come from the following organisations:**

- Newcastle City Council – the Newcastle City Centre Plan recommends three level crossings: Worth Place, Steel Street, Argyle Street/Darby Street.²⁸
- The Newcastle Alliance – calls for two crossings: one at Steel Street and a second one between Wickham and Civic Station.²⁹
- Newcastle Business for Transport – calls for crossings at Steel Street and Worth Place.
- RailCorp – in its submission to the Newcastle City Centre Plan states “*support new crossings and links*”.³⁰
- Ministry of Transport, in documentation for Urbis, lists “*Additional north-south at-grade pedestrian and vehicular crossings east of Stewart Avenue.*”³¹

The fact that another crossing or overbridge exists within 500 metres may well justify refusing a new crossing in a suburban or rural situation. **It does not justify refusing a new crossing in Newcastle CBD.** Newcastle is not unique. Other cities such as Fremantle and San Diego have similar physical attributes to Newcastle and have overcome connectivity problems without loss of the heavy rail asset. It is universally agreed that present access across the line is inadequate.

In any fair Cost Benefit Analysis (CBA), the provision of a series of crossings with appropriate automatically operating “safety” gates (as in the upgrade at Merewether Street) would compare favourably with cutting the line. (The Urbis CBA is flawed, as explored further in this document). **The sacrifice of the line would create much greater financial costs in a replacement terminal.** The loss of the well used rail line would come at economic costs to business viability as well as huge social cost to the community in terms of inconvenience and hardship, environmental detriment and loss of valued heritage.

Community consultation

MEETINGS

- There were four consultative meetings organised by Key Insights, three of the four being restricted to developers and Government representatives. The fourth meeting headed Transport was open to the public, but in the event was dominated by GPT whose representatives were given free reign and who used it to make an announcement. This was in the form of an ultimatum, that it would not proceed with its development of the Hunter Street Mall unless the Government cut the rail line back to Wickham.
- The Hunter Business Chamber (HBC), which is very supportive of closing the rail line, held a “public forum” on the issue. The chairman allowed the HBC’s chosen

²⁸ Newcastle City Centre Plan LEP 2008, gazetted 01/02/2008

²⁹ M. Blaxland, “Road to Nowhere”, Newcastle Post, 4/2007

³⁰ NSW Government, submission to Newcastle City Centre Plan, 2007

³¹ NSW Ministry of Transport, “Preliminary Rail Options and Costs Assessment”, April 2009; referenced by Urbis, “Newcastle CBD Strategy – Rail Proposal Cost Benefit Assessment”, May 2009

presenters generous amounts of time to argue for cutting the line. Prof. Steffen Lehmann, whose position has been funded by the very people who want to close the rail line, spoke well over the 30 minutes indicated on the agenda. When the President of Save Our Rail was allowed to ask one question only, the chairperson allowed Prof Lehmann to answer with a further rant.

His reply was that Newcastle had a “nineteenth century transport system” which needed to be replaced by modern buses. The SOR spokesperson was not allowed to speak again to point out that the electric and diesel powered trains provided by the NSW Labor Government to service the cities of Newcastle and Maitland use modern technology. The nineteenth century steam trains are long gone, initially replaced by diesels with the Wran Labor Government providing the electric train service to Newcastle in 1984. State of the art diesel trains, upgraded in 2007, operate on the Hunter Line between Newcastle and Scone and from Newcastle to Dungog.

SURVEYS

1. The survey conducted by Hunter Valley Research Foundation (HVRF) commissioned by GPT³² could not be considered valid, because:

- **The questions, devised by GPT, were loaded.** A question about rail was:

“Do you think that terminating the rail line at Wickham and replacing it with an efficient, modern bus transit system, thereby allowing the connection of the CBD and harbour foreshore, would help the development of the city?”

This was an example of “push polling” and the result reflected the question.

As well the sample included a disproportionate number of residents from Merewether (22.6%). This is a relatively affluent suburb, with high car ownership and is **not situated on or near the rail line**, the only public transport option being buses. The postcode of 2289 was 15% of the survey. This includes relatively well off areas such as Adamstown Heights, serviced only by bus transport, though it does include areas that have rail access such as Adamstown and Kotara (however Kotara was excluded as it lies outside the Newcastle state electorate).

The Newcastle *Herald* reported:³³

The survey asked residents about the main matters holding Newcastle back from becoming a world-class area.

The derelict or poor state of the CBD topped the list, nominated by 19 per cent of residents.

In another question, residents were asked to rate the importance of eight matters, including the line, security, employment opportunities and green spaces, when considering development of the CBD.

³² Hunter Valley Research Foundation, “Attitudes Toward Redevelopment of the Newcastle CBD: Survey of Residents in the Newcastle Electorate” (for GPT), November 2008

³³ Michelle Harris, “Majority calls for end of railway line”, The Newcastle Herald, 02/12/2008

Appendix C: Save Our Rail Response to HDC Report

A foundation report on the survey found all the subjects except the removal of the heavy rail rated an average response of at least "quite important".

Safety and security received a mean rating of 4.7 out of 5, "very important", but removal of the rail line was at the bottom of the rankings, with a rating of three or "moderately important".

However, the report noted that easy access between the Foreshore and Hunter Street was "quite important", or a four out of five average rating.

The report said about 40 per cent of the comments that supported the removal of heavy rail specified that it should be replaced by light rail.

- **The resident sample was inappropriate** as it was restricted to only the Newcastle State Electorate area. This forms only a part of the Newcastle Local Government Area, which has a lower than average rail patronage of 2%.³⁴ The rail usage of the entire Hunter Region is 5%. GPT selectively targeted a demographic much less likely to use or support retention of the rail. Had the survey included the wider Hunter Region there would have no doubt been fewer responses favouring cutting the rail. Further if the target was of areas actually served by rail, and needing public transport, such as Maitland or Morisset, rather than a disproportionate focus on Merewether, the results would have been more favourable to the retention of the rail.

This survey was akin to asking a person if they eat more apples than whortleberries, if they lived where whortleberries are not available.

- **The option as push polled by GPT does not reflect the reality of what is actually proposed in the HDC report, which is to use the existing bus service.** This is the "town bus" along Hunter Street with no seamless interchange, the passengers having to walk to the Hunter Street bus stop and compete for places in an already crowded bus from an outer area. As buses have a definite limit of passengers some will no doubt have to wait for a following bus. **It is invalid to use this (misrepresentative) survey result as support for cutting the rail line.**
2. The Member for Newcastle initiated an online survey through BangTheTable. This by its nature was restricted to the computer literate section of the community. As those who most use and need rail services are often in the lower socio-economic group and therefore less likely to have access to a computer, it is an inappropriate form of survey. The limited sample skews the result because it is not a comprehensive survey of the Hunter community. Online polls are easily manipulated and open to abuse. The providers of BangTheTable are known to be developer lobbyists, who claim success in gaining Government approval for their clients' projects.³⁵

³⁴ Hunter Development Corporation, "Newcastle City Centre Renewal Report to NSW Government", March 2009, p29

³⁵ Alex Mitchell, "Lobbyists are behind community forum site Bang the Table", crikey.com.au, 02/07/2008

Legal precinct

HDC seizes on the need for an upgrade to legal and court facilities to require the relocation to the Civic precinct of all legal services, even though many of these are still viable in their present situation. The Newcastle Law Society is opposed to this relocation, which was not what was required, and they feel it would retard the provision of the new facilities that are urgently needed.³⁶

The transport needs of the current justice precinct are well served by direct rail services to Newcastle Station. The Save Our Rail survey, 2005, showed many Hunter Valley passengers use trains to access legal services.

The necessary new facilities can be achieved without the need to cut the line.

University of Newcastle

An interest and intention by Newcastle University to extend its campus provision within the city is being used in the report as an inference that the University is supportive of the closure of the rail line. The Vice Chancellor has since publicly stated that the University has not taken a position on this issue, nor will it.^{37, 38}

The relocation of University facilities can be achieved without cutting the line to Wickham. There is nothing in the HDC report that provides any support for the suggestion that development of the CBD campus is contingent upon the termination of the rail at Wickham. In fact the rail will be more crucial for the effective movement of such a large number of students between the two campus areas.

Under the heading “*Catalyst Projects that are Contingent on the Removal of the Rail Line*”, the Urbis report states:³⁹

“The University of Newcastle perceives the removal of the rail line to be a key success factor for development of a CBD campus. To this end, if the rail is not removed this may jeopardise the development of the CBD campus going ahead.”

This is false information as the Vice Chancellor has indicated.

³⁶ “Legal Eagles are Unhappy”, Newcastle Herald, Catherine Henry is quoted as saying “[HDC] recommendations could impede projects for new state and federal courts that were close to fruition” and “No one has put forward any logical reason for moving the precinct.”

³⁷ “Uni has no line on rail”, Newcastle Herald, 04/06/2009

³⁸ Email from Vice Chancellor Nicholas Saunders to NU Student Union Representative, 02/06/2009; Prof Saunders wrote “the University has not taken a position on the fate of the heavy rail line in Newcastle nor will it.”

³⁹ Urbis, “Newcastle CBD Strategy – Rail Proposal Cost Benefit Assessment” (for HDC), May 2009, p6

Appendix C: Save Our Rail Response to HDC Report

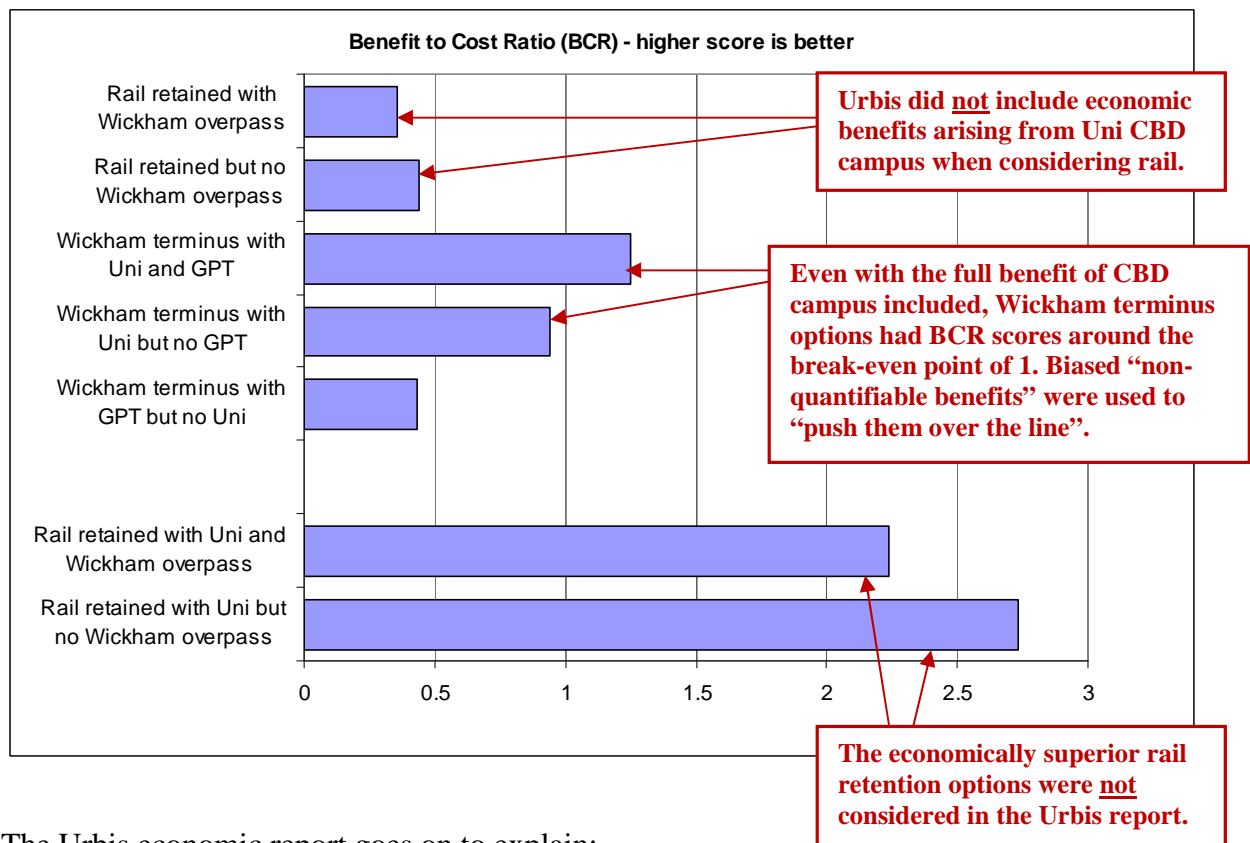
Economic analysis

The Urbis economic report states: ⁴⁰

“Thus, the economic benefits associated with the CBD campus development are also only considered realisable if the rail is removed. These benefits are therefore incorporated into the CBA analysis of the preferred rail option [Wickham terminus west of Stewart Avenue].”

A fair assessment would involve combining the University expansion with retention of the rail. There is no demonstrable reason for believing this development would not be equally successful whilst retaining the rail. **This combination was not considered by HDC.**

Once the benefits of the new CBD campus are factored into rail retention options, keeping the rail has a superior benefit-cost ratio (BCR) of **2.24**. Reducing the cost by not creating a rail overpass at Stewart Avenue increases the BCR to **2.73**. Note that the best Wickham termination option scores only **1.25** (see graph below).



The Urbis economic report goes on to explain:

“Basically when choosing between different options the option with the higher BCR is superior to ones with lower values.”

If the university CBD campus is included on the benefit side of both options (cut the rail and keep the rail) then retaining the rail emerges as the far superior option in cost benefit terms (by almost \$200 million more on Net Present Value). Keeping the rail is the economically superior choice.

⁴⁰ Urbis, “Newcastle CBD Strategy – Rail Proposal Cost Benefit Assessment” (for HDC), May 2009, p6

The calculations below show how the BCR scores were calculated. All were figures obtained or derived from Urbis cost-benefit analysis using the medium discount rate of 7%. The net present value (NPV) benefit of the University CBD campus is \$537 million.

Options considered in Urbis economic report

Rail retained with Stewart Avenue overpass constructed

<i>PV of Costs</i>	<i>PV of Benefits</i>	<i>NPV</i>	<i>BCR</i>
\$285.8m	\$103.6m	-\$182.2m	0.36

Rail retained but no Stewart Avenue overpass

<i>PV of Costs</i>	<i>PV of Benefits</i>	<i>NPV</i>	<i>BCR</i>
\$234.5	\$103.6m	-\$130.8m	0.44

HDC Terminate at Wickham base case assuming GPT retail and CBD Campus

<i>PV of Costs</i>	<i>PV of Benefits</i>	<i>NPV</i>	<i>BCR</i>
\$657.7m	\$821.0m	+\$163.4m	1.25

HDC Terminate at Wickham scenario with CBD Campus but excluding GPT retail

<i>PV of Costs</i>	<i>PV of Benefits</i>	<i>NPV</i>	<i>BCR</i>
\$657.7m	\$617.4m	-\$40.3m	0.94

HDC Terminate at Wickham scenario with GPT retail but excluding CBD Campus

<i>PV of Costs</i>	<i>PV of Benefits</i>	<i>NPV</i>	<i>BCR</i>
\$657.7m	\$284.1m	-\$373.5m	0.43

Options that were omitted from Urbis reported based on flawed assumptions about University CBD campus

Rail retained with Stewart Avenue overpass constructed and with CBD Campus

<i>PV of Costs</i>	<i>PV of Benefits</i>	<i>NPV</i>	<i>BCR</i>
\$285.8m	\$640.6m	+\$354.8m	2.24

Rail retained with no Stewart Avenue overpass but with University CBD Campus

<i>PV of Costs</i>	<i>PV of Benefits</i>	<i>NPV</i>	<i>BCR</i>
\$234.5	\$640.6m	+\$406.1m	2.73

Rail costs

WICKHAM VIADUCT

The cost estimates used in the HDC report using Parsons Brinckerhoff (PB) figures inexplicably increase the cost of elevated rail when considering options that retain the rail to Newcastle.⁴¹

PB option 3 (real retained; elevated heavy rail)	PB option 7 (Wickham terminus east of Stewart Avenue with grade separation)
viaduct = \$175m (why so much?) stations = \$120m (why so much?) landscaping = \$3m; stabling = \$26m	Stewart Avenue grade separation = \$77m stations = \$45m rehabilitation and landscaping = \$3m stabling = \$26m removal and reconfiguration = \$40m contingency and unpriced items = \$49m
contingency and unpriced items = \$76m Total capital expenditure = \$400m	Total capital expenditure = \$240m

⁴¹ Parsons Brinckerhoff, "Newcastle CBD Integrated Transport Identification of Preferred Scheme" (for HDC), March 2009, p13 & p21

Appendix C: Save Our Rail Response to HDC Report

By way of comparison, the scenic Sea Cliff Bridge near Coalcliff (Illawarra) was completed at a cost of \$52 million in 2005. Given this bridge's 455.5 m total length and maximum height of 41 metres over harsh terrain, it is difficult to understand why Save Our Rail's proposal for a straight rail viaduct over flat terrain is assessed as being so expensive.⁴²



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Also not explained by PB is why the elevated heavy rail option 3 requires \$120m to be spent on stations, whereas the elevated Wickham rail terminus (necessarily more complicated than a non-terminus station) option 7 costs only \$45m.

ANNUAL RECURRENT OPERATING COSTS

The \$13.4 annual recurrent operating costs quoted in the Urbis cost benefit assessment are a gross exaggeration and have been obtained from the discredited LHTWG reports. A more realistic RailCorp estimate of \$4 million per annum has been recently quoted in the Newcastle Herald.⁴⁴

Urbis' assumption that a Wickham terminus would share in only 25% of the costs of the Newcastle branch line is unrealistic. A large proportion of the line's costs are presently incurred at Newcastle simply because it is the terminus. **Making Wickham the new terminus simply transfers these costs.**

The loss of revenue arising from the reduced patronage caused by an interrupted journey has not been factored into the assessment. This is significant as the annual ticket revenue is \$1,079,872 at Newcastle Station and \$429,376 at Civic Station.⁴⁵ **The two stations that HDC is proposing to close generate approximately \$1.5 million per year in ticket revenue and this revenue has been ignored.**

⁴² Save Our Rail's December 2008 proposal for a rail viaduct starts at ground level at east of Selma Street, rises for 270m to Railway Street, continues at full height (5m clearance) for 560m to Hannell St, then falls for 270m returning to ground level west of Steel St.

⁴³ Images from RTA web page "Lawrence Hargrave Drive photographs", http://www.rta.nsw.gov.au/constructionmaintenance/downloads/lhd_photos_dl1.html

⁴⁴ Michelle Harris, "\$4m ticket for rail line", Newcastle Herald, 27/10/2008

⁴⁵ Ian Kirkwood, "Rundown rail' as passengers pass by", Newcastle Herald, 12/05/09; citing RailCorp/CityRail figures on 2007-2008 ticket revenues by station

Non-quantifiable benefits

The Urbis cost benefit assessment states “...*if a scenario emerged whereby the University of Newcastle did not proceed with its major city campus development, the preferred rail option (i.e. cut the line at Wickham) would post a net cost to the community as measured at the state level, however would provide a number of local benefits that are not measurable due to actual or perceived transfer effects.*”

The document goes on to list “non-quantifiable local benefits” as follows (with SOR response):

- ❖ *Facilitate the evolution of a more integrated Newcastle CBD*

Integration involves connecting the transport modes as well as providing access over them. To cut the line at Wickham would disconnect the ferry service to Stockton and Port Stephens and a possible future connection to Newcastle airport. The bus services are well connected to the rail but this would be less efficient and more costly at Wickham. **Access over the rail can be achieved by crossings and road/rail separation as in the Save Our Rail proposal for CBD integration. The measures in the SOR proposal are far less costly than the plans outlined in the HDC report.**

- ❖ *Facilitate linkages and the agglomeration of economic activity in the Newcastle CBD*

As above the SOR proposal connects the business sectors, allows for bus commute for workers, provides a new station near the Hunter Street Mall (GPT), and improved access between Newcastle Station and the Mall.

- ❖ *Facilitate investor confidence*

Prof Peter Newman has stated that research shows the presence of rail boosts investor confidence.⁴⁶

- ❖ *Increased Revenue Base for Newcastle City Council*

Development which would boost Newcastle City Council revenue can be achieved without cutting the rail line.

- ❖ *Higher and better land use*

This is explained on page 11 of Urbis, “urban design opportunities to use the corridor for other purposes and to develop sites abutting the corridor”.⁴⁷ **This is inconsistent with statements about the rail corridor being preserved as a “green corridor”.**

- ❖ *Improvement in residential amenity*

Residential amenity will suffer because of the increased car and bus traffic, consequent pollution and competition for parking.

⁴⁶ Prof Peter Newman, “It’s not tunnel vision, rail means business”, Newcastle Herald, 20/04/05

⁴⁷ Urbis, “Newcastle CBD Strategy – Rail Proposal Cost Benefit Assessment” (for HDC), May 2009, p11

Appendix C: Save Our Rail Response to HDC Report

- ❖ *Reduced noise and vibration levels in the heart of the city*

If you choose to live near a rail line you get the benefit of convenient, reliable transport, and expect some noise to which most people adapt quickly.

Non-quantifiable benefits can be found to favour the retention of the line but these are ignored in the equation delivered in the report, including:

- The benefit to the community, as in the findings of expert, Mike Smart, who estimated the costs of not using train travel, instead going by car at \$15.80 an hour, based on “externalities” such as congestion and pollution.^{48, 49}
- Social needs, including the benefit of rail transport for the physically disabled, the frail aged, families with small children in prams, surfers carrying boards, cyclists and blind people who cannot easily access buses. The social cost to these groups in an in-trip exchange would be immense.
- “Peak Oil” is when the oil supplies have reached their peak and its availability for energy will diminish. This has been reached or is imminent; therefore it is becoming necessary for other forms of transport than cars and buses to be encouraged. The role of trains will become increasingly important and the existing rail system in Newcastle delivers this benefit. **Rail has the advantage of an opportunity for expansion of its use as diminishing oil reserves and climate change force changes in travel habits.**
- Heritage is mentioned in the report, but in the Newcastle situation the rail heritage must be counted as a benefit. The train service between Maitland and Newcastle has been operating for more than 150 years. The heritage building, Newcastle Station is an asset, which needs to be fully capitalised not wasted, as has occurred with the Newcastle Post Office, lying idle for 10 years. Future benefits could include tourist activity involving possible “heritage” steam train trips, additional to Maitland’s Steamfest (which cannot occur if the line is closed), which could include tours of the various heritage venues such as The Maritime Centre and Civic Theatre, or to Fort Scratchley and Nobby’s Lighthouse.
- **Professor Peter Newman described sustainability as “reducing the ecological footprint, that is the effect we (humans) leave behind environmentally”.**⁵⁰ He said successful cities have less car use. Any reduction of rail infrastructure goes against the NSW Government 25 year plan “*Actions for Air*”, which includes a stated aim to reduce vehicle kilometres travelled (VKT). Increased car usage and added bus kilometres with diesel fumes will cause deterioration of local air quality and increased global warming and greenhouse gas effects.
- There are non-rail user benefits as described by RailCorp:

“Rail users are not the only beneficiaries of an efficient rail network. Benefits from rail also accrue to road users through reduced road congestion, travel time savings and car operating costs and to non-rail users through reduced noise and air pollution, road accidents and energy consumption etc. These are positive externalities. An analysis of RailCorp investment evaluations has indicated that non-user benefits including road decongestion and externalities

⁴⁸ Mike Smart, “Value of Sydney bus externalities and optimal Government subsidy – Draft Report” (for IPART), 12/05/09

⁴⁹ Andrew West, “Train ride subsidies pay off: expert.”, Sydney Morning Herald, 10/06/09

⁵⁰ Peter Newman, address to UDIA (Urban Development Institute of Australia), Warners Bay NSW, 28/07/04

account for an average of 34 per cent of project benefits. Because non-user benefits are a major contributor to the economic worth of rail projects, their monetary values are important in determining project viability.”⁵¹

In consideration of the “net loss” to the community if the University did not expand into the city as previously stated, the equation applying the BCR becomes a net benefit in retaining the rail with the above “non-quantifiable” items further tipping the balance.

Travel times

The HDC report includes flawed and biased reporting of travel times by transport modes between Wickham and Newcastle.

Train travel time is misrepresented:

- **An extra “2 minutes of dwell time” has been added to rail figures. This is dishonest** and means, with PB’s other flawed travel time figures, that rail appears to be the slowest mode of travel (when it is actually the fastest). Why not apply this “dwell time” consistently to all travel modes instead of penalising rail?
- Trains are timetabled as 4 minutes and do not vary. Listing train times as “averages” may suggest a large variability in times (that does not exist).
- Rail benefits regarding constant travel times are ignored.
- Rail benefits regarding fast peak loading/unloading times are ignored.

Car travel time figures are flawed for a number of reasons:

- All trips were measured inbound; typically a faster trip especially in peak times (as demonstrated by 2008 bus timetables) resulting in an anti-rail bias.
- A sample set of 4 trips is too few, and inbound AM peak times would likely be reduced by averaging with faster midday and afternoon inbound trips.
- No methodology was listed to explain the specifics of the sample journeys undertaken. Significant items such as time of day (6am could be considered a “morning” trip), day of week, weather, public holiday, school holidays, special event, etc. are not explained.
- Misleading journey starting point. A representative starting point for inward trips is from the “The Store” building where the “City West” bus stop is located as the HDC proposed terminus is located west of Stewart Avenue (which may take several minutes to cross during peak times).
- Misleading journey end point. The time taken to park the car (either kerbside or in a parking station) can be a significant component of the vehicle journey time (especially during busy hours) and has been ignored. **Unless HDC proposes that all commuter vehicles be parked – illegally – at the intersection of Scott and Watt Streets, then their omission of time to park a vehicle is misleading.**

⁵¹ RailCorp, “A Compendium of CityRail Travel Statistics – Sixth Edition”, p74

Appendix C: Save Our Rail Response to HDC Report

Bus travel time figures are flawed for a number of reasons:

- **The 6 minutes bus travel time is a best-case figure and not an “average” as indicated by HDC.**
- Misleading use of outdated bus timetable information which did not accurately model peak period traffic delays. The November 2008 timetable has revised times that more accurately reflect actual bus running times, with increased peak journey times:

Time of day (weekdays)	Travel time	
	Inbound	Outbound
Before 7 am	6 mins	7 mins
7 am to 8 am	8 mins	7 mins
8 am to 9 am	9 mins	10 mins
9 am to 12 pm	8 mins	10 mins
12 pm to 6 pm	8 mins	10 mins
After 6 pm	6 mins	7 mins

- Faster inward bus journey times take into account no boarding delays due to ticket purchase or ticket “dipping” as a result of the CBD bus “fare-free zone”. If this scheme ended there would be an increase in travel time. If the fare structure changed from time-based to zone-based, the more complex fare structure may slow down driver ticket sales.

Rail has the fastest travel time from Wickham to Newcastle, especially at peak times. Buses have the slowest travel time.

Note: Averages do not account for true needs and are irrelevant in determining transport need. The high point or peak time needs can be enormous while the “average” takes into account the lowest use. This reduces the apparent need and could result in transport disruption if the higher figure is not adequately provided for. An “average usage figure” has been used to reduce the apparent use of the rail to a ridiculously low figure. This is an unfair misuse of a statistic. Roads are not in full use at 4.00 am and there are no buses running at that time. Buses are often almost empty during the day. **To reduce train use to the level of an average is misleading and to provide transport accordingly could cause a serious shortfall in peak times.**

Patronage

The statement by HDC that patronage has not increased since 2003 needs comment.⁵² Despite the fact that rail is less available than buses (note the previous comparison of choosing apples or whortleberries, in an area where whortleberries are not available) the patronage of rail has increased while bus patronage has remained the same.

⁵² Hunter Development Corporation, “Newcastle City Centre Renewal Report to NSW Government”, March 2009, p49

Rail has held its ground with a journey to work mode share of 5% over recent decades, while bus patronage has declined over the same period. Parsons Brinckerhoff reports that “[bus] patronage numbers have been stable for four years [prior to 2007/08]”.⁵³

Recently released figures reveal the rail patronage in the region has increased by 5.9% between 2007 and 2008 (see Table 1 below) while bus achieved only a 2.3% increase over a similar period.⁵⁴

Station	Trips 2007	Trips 2008	% Change	Trips Increase	Station Incr. as % of Total Region Incr.
Newcastle	221,203	248,374	+12.3%	27,171	+18.1%
Maitland	154,421	178,562	+15.6%	24,141	+16.1%
Hamilton	194,553	215,846	+10.9%	21,293	+14.2%
Cardiff	230,628	245,482	+6.4%	14,854	+9.9%
Broadmeadow	294,529	308,285	+4.7%	13,756	+9.2%
Morisset	320,784	331,078	+3.2%	10,294	+6.9%
Civic	101,845	111,996	+10.0%	10,151	+6.8%
Wyee	120,642	128,546	+6.6%	7,904	+5.3%
Metford	44,127	50,847	+15.2%	6,720	+4.5%
Wickham	35,411	41,937	+18.4%	6,526	+4.4%
Victoria Street	142,188	148,710	+4.6%	6,522	+4.4%
Warabrook (University)	48,808	51,422	+5.4%	2,614	+1.7%
Adamstown	12,778	15,016	+17.5%	2,238	+1.5%
Dungog	11,965	13,379	+11.8%	1,414	+0.9%
Kotara	8,955	10,158	+13.4%	1,203	+0.8%
Cockle Creek	4,737	5,689	+20.1%	952	+0.6%
Muswellbrook	17,603	18,178	+3.3%	575	+0.4%
Beresfield	85,521	86,037	+0.6%	516	+0.3%
Awaba	5,437	5,913	+8.8%	476	+0.3%
Dora Creek	12,632	12,983	+2.8%	351	+0.2%
Teralba	9,306	9,572	+2.9%	266	+0.2%
Hexham	300	n/a			
East Maitland	9,631	9,259	-3.9%	-372	-0.2%
Thornton	82,177	81,245	-1.1%	-932	-0.6%
Booragul	9,201	8,068	-12.3%	-1,133	-0.8%
Fassifern	213,967	212,719	-0.6%	-1,248	-0.8%
Singleton	17,945	15,810	-11.9%	-2,135	-1.4%
Waratah	79,547	76,649	+0.1%	-2,898	-1.9%
Telarah	66,088	62,041	-6.1%	-4,047	-2.7%
TOTAL	2,556,929	2,706,801	+5.9%	149,872	+100.0%

Table 1: CityRail passenger journeys 2007 and 2008⁵⁵

In the context of the HDC proposal to cut the rail at Wickham, the two stations to be cut, Newcastle and Civic, account for 18.1% and 6.8% of the passenger journey increase in the entire region. **HDC proposes to cut the two stations that, combined, represent 25% the**

⁵³ Parsons Brinckerhoff, “Newcastle CBD Integrated Transport Identification of Preferred Scheme” (for HDC), March 2009, p4

⁵⁴ Michelle Harris, “City workers lead regional commute”, Newcastle Herald, 30/10/2008; article states: “The Ministry of Transport has reported patronage on Newcastle Buses increased by 2.3% in the 12 months to June this year [2008]”

⁵⁵ Michelle Harris, “Workers training to avoid traffic”, Newcastle Herald, 21/02/2009; article includes passenger figures from RailCorp

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entire region’s growth in passenger numbers. Both stations, especially Newcastle, are attracting significant numbers of new passengers.

Newcastle, according to recent CityRail data, has the highest patronage of any station north of Wyong. Civic has the fourth highest ranking while Wickham is ranked thirteenth, having 720 recorded entrances and exits as against Newcastle recorded 2,780 (see Table 2 below).

Station	02:00-06:00		06:00-9:30		09:30-15:00		15:00-18:30		18:30-02:00		24 hours In + Out	Rank
	In	Out	In	Out	In	Out	In	Out	In	Out		
Newcastle	50	20	240	290	650	770	390	180	60	120	2,780	1
B'meadow	60	10	280	350	210	170	320	270	30	110	1,800	2
Hamilton	30	10	170	220	340	280	260	250	90	140	1,780	3
Civic	30	10	90	370	300	280	410	200	50	20	1,760	4
Morriset	50	10	540	80	130	150	100	470	20	140	1,680	5
Warabrook (University)	10	10	50	330	180	260	290	90	190	30	1,440	6
Cardiff	50	10	260	90	140	90	100	310	40	110	1,180	7
Maitland	0	10	200	110	190	220	160	190	20	50	1,140	8
Fassifern	20	0	270	70	60	60	80	240	10	70	880	9
Victoria St	0	0	190	50	120	120	80	180	20	50	820	10
Waratah	0	0	100	100	140	140	110	120	30	30	760	=11
Beresfield	0	0	170	80	130	100	70	170	10	30	760	=11
Wickham	10	0	30	170	120	110	180	80	20	10	720	13
Wye	20	0	220	10	70	50	10	210	0	50	640	14
Thornton	0	0	170	30	60	90	60	160	10	20	600	15
Warnervale	20	0	170	30	40	50	40	150	10	40	560	16
Telarah	0	0	120	40	70	60	60	130	20	30	540	17
Metford	0	0	120	20	60	70	30	110	10	10	440	18
Booragul	0	0	30	30	40	50	40	30	10	10	240	=19
E. Maitland	0	0	20	50	50	40	50	20	0	10	240	=19

Table 2: CityRail 2007 weekday station entries and exits for the busiest stations north of Wyong⁵⁶

Note that “number of passengers” for a station is not simply half of the 24 hour total number because not all passengers make a return journey. Also, the figures above do not communicate the extraordinary peak loads at Newcastle Station for special events at the foreshore such as New Years Eve and Australia Day.

Simply put, the HDC proposes to take out the most highly patronised and the fourth most highly patronised stations in the Hunter. How will this increase patronage?

CityRail has recently provided additional cars (2-car set extended to 4-cars) on the Maitland to Newcastle run because of the increased usage of rail on the Hunter Line, causing standing room only from Thornton. The Newcastle Herald reported *“it is understood the bigger train often ran at near capacity during the trial with CityRail surveys finding many of the people were new rail passengers, rather than people switching from other services”*.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ A Compendium of CityRail Travel Statistics, Sixth Edition, June 2008, p89

⁵⁷ Michelle Harris, “Extra rail carriages popular with commuters”, Newcastle Herald, 01/04/2009

Position of rail

All HDC (formerly Honeysuckle) assessment is consistent with their apparent aim to cut the rail. It appears the rail retention options only received superficial examination.

All rail retention options are dismissed out of hand because they “reinforce rail in the wrong position”. The rail corridor runs typically only 10 to 60 metres north of Hunter Street which is HDC’s preferred trunk (bus) transport corridor. **HDC’s argument is false.** HDC does not reveal the location of the “right” position and evaluate rail options in that location.

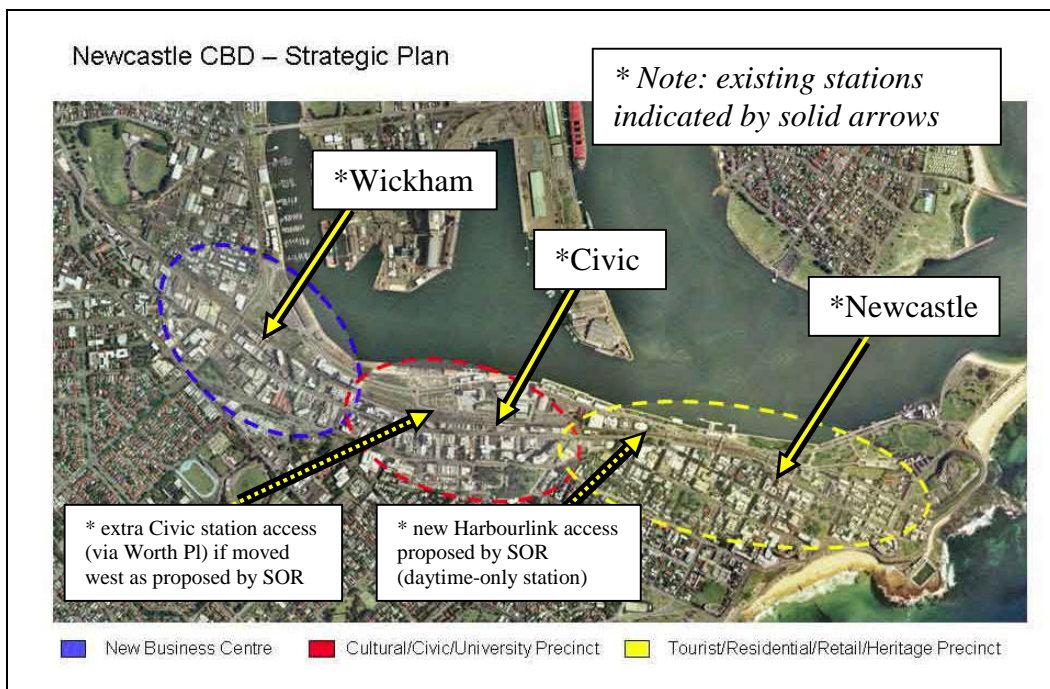


Figure 1: HDC’s Strategic Plan Map with annotations by Save Our Rail

Note: all labels added by Save Our Rail are noted with an asterisk (*)

With mention of rail in the “wrong” position, it is interesting to re-examine **HDC’s CBD Strategic Plan map** (see Figure 1 above).⁵⁸ **At the centre of each of the three key precincts you will find the three existing rail stations: Wickham, Civic, and Newcastle. How is this not the “right position”?**

The HDC reports states that “*half the potential catchment of the rail line in its current location is on Newcastle harbour*”.⁵⁹ **This is untrue; look at HDC’s own map** (Figure 1 above). The existing stations are central in their precinct catchment areas. Newcastle station’s catchment does encompass some of the harbour but this is a positive aspect as it allows the station to connect with the Stockton Ferry (ignored in the HDC report) and allows for the possibility of a cruise ship terminal located near Queen’s Wharf. Note that local geography (the steep hill behind the Hunter Street Mall)⁶⁰ would have prevented Newcastle Station being built further to the south.

⁵⁸ Hunter Development Corporation, “Newcastle City Centre Renewal Report to NSW Government”, March 2009, p2

⁵⁹ Hunter Development Corporation, “Newcastle City Centre Renewal Report to NSW Government”, March 2009, p56

⁶⁰ Urbis, “Newcastle CBD Strategy – Rail Proposal Cost Benefit Assessment”, (for HDC), May 2009, p10

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Furthermore, the improvements proposed by Save Our Rail, would:

- a) Place Civic station further to the west (nearer to Worth Place) resulting in a station with entrances that match the centre of the red precinct oval above. This relocation would open up the Civic area and is consistent with NCC's vision of a unified cultural precinct.⁶¹
- b) Add a new Harbourlink station to fill the gap on the left area of the yellow precinct oval (for retail in particular).

The passenger carrying rail line has been in its present location for 150 years, pre-dating the Hunter Street retail and commercial development. It could be argued that the "new" commercial premises at Honeysuckle were built in the "wrong" location, which created the situation of a divided city centre. Honeysuckle enterprises, touted as job creators and revenue raisers are actually relocations from the Hunter Street side, including: Hunter Water, Sparke Helmore, NIB, Price Waterhouse Coopers, the Premier's Department and the Crowne Plaza Hotel.

- Was it the lack of provision of north-south connections when developing Honeysuckle that is "wrong"?
- Pro-rail options are rejected, in significant part, based on flawed cost-benefit analysis (details of flaws are noted earlier in this document).

"Improved" transit system

For the monumental sum of \$650 million, the HDC report proposes building a Wickham terminus that provides no transport benefit whatsoever. (The north-south connectivity benefits to pedestrians and cyclists are achievable with Save Our Rail's proposal based on level crossings).

The HDC Wickham terminus proposal:

- Increases travel time for rail commuters
- Buses will not cope with peak loads of remaining commuters to/from rail
- Reduces rail patronage, forcing many commuter into their cars
- Increases traffic in the Newcastle CBD (result of above)
- Causes environmental degradation (result of above)
- Increases car and bus travel time in the Newcastle CBD (see above)
- Reduces bus patronage as a result of slower journey times (see above)
- More cars in the CBD competing for the same number of parking bays
- Cuts off the ferry connection to Stockton, reducing options for peninsula residents to Port Stephens and reducing future options for Airport connection.
- Makes travel very difficult or impossible for blind or less mobile passengers
- Limits future capacity for transport in a car-reduced society (Peak Oil)

⁶¹ Pittendrigh Shinkfield and Bruce, Department of Urban Affairs and Planning, Newcastle City Council; "Honeysuckle Public Domain Strategy" (for Honeysuckle Development Corporation); final November 2000, p49

Proposed new “Blue Shuttle” buses⁶² are not included in the Urbis cost benefit analysis and therefore cannot be considered as part of the HDC proposal. **There are no bus costs in the HDC reports.** The HDC preferred option is described by PB as “*replacement of rail with an alternative public transport system based on low emission buses (utilising some existing excess capacity in the bus network)*”.⁶³ The “Blue Shuttle” sounds very attractive, but it does not exist and the State Government does not have the resources to introduce a new bus system nor to provide additional buses. **The reality is that the existing town bus (also blue) would be used and would be stuck in the same Hunter Street traffic as the cars.**

In February 2005 Save Our Rail organised its “Superior Bus” demonstration to test whether the existing bus service would carry a train load of passenger from Newcastle to Civic Station.⁶⁴

- At 3:00pm on a weekday approximately 200 people tried to board buses on Hunter Street opposite Newcastle Station.
- The first bus took about 30 people without difficulty except that by the time they were loaded there were about five other buses jammed in behind it.
- After about four buses had passed a bus capable of taking wheel chairs arrived, and the driver loaded one wheel chair. He refused to take any more wheel chairs.
- All buses refused to take push bikes.
- A lady with a walker was loaded onto a bus with some difficulty. By this time buses were banked up the street as far as we could see. No bus could move.
- By 3.30pm there were still about a hundred people awaiting entry on the bus, and it was decided to abandon the bus and walk to Civic station and catch a train instead!
- **It was proved that buses cannot cope with transporting a train load of passengers.**



The Wickham terminus would cause the same chaos as demonstrated by Save Our Rail in 2005.

PB proposes that existing State Government bus services be cut from Newcastle and Lake Macquarie to fund the “Blue Shuttle” buses.⁶⁵

The Wickham interchange is not a “seamless” interchange – not even close to it! The PB report states:

“Rail passengers ... disembark their trains into a modern, attractive, easy access terminus called Newcastle at the western gateway to the Newcastle CBD. Interactive information kiosks and directional signs help them choose

⁶² Parsons Brinckerhoff, “Newcastle CBD Integrated Transport Identification of Preferred Scheme” (for HDC), March 2009, p29

⁶³ Urbis, “Newcastle CBD Strategy – Rail Proposal Cost Benefit Assessment” (for HDC), May 2009, p6

⁶⁴ Save Our Rail “Superior Bus Demonstration”, Wednesday 23 February 2005, at 3:00pm

⁶⁵ Parsons Brinckerhoff, “Newcastle CBD Integrated Transport Identification of Preferred Scheme” (for HDC), March 2009, p23; quotation: “Despite the frequent bus service in Hunter Street, a dedicated shuttle bus would meet every train at an additional cost unless some services can be rationalised in response to the new shuttle.”

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whether to travel to connecting bus services in major stops in Hunter Street or Stewart Avenue to locations such as Newcastle Airport, Newcastle University's City or Callaghan campuses, the employment areas north of the CBD and along the Pacific Highway. Or if the travellers are heading for the eastern CBD, there will be a waiting Blue Shuttle to take them past the stops the rail spur line used to serve, but with additional intermediate stops.”

Therefore, the “interchange” is achieved by alighting at Wickham Station, walking to Hunter Street, waiting for the next bus (assuming it isn't full), and getting on a bus that will take up to 9 minutes to get to Newcastle Station. Remember, the train to Newcastle took only 4 minutes. Coming home is even slower: the bus out of town takes longer, up to 10 minutes, and is full of other “interchanging” commuters. You alight at City West Hunter Street where there is a walk to the traffic lights to cross busy Hunter Street. Once the lights have allowed you to cross, you can walk to the Wickham “interchange” and wait for your train. If the bus was held up in traffic then you've missed your train – and it might be quite a while until the next one. God help you if you are blind or physically disabled or just old and tired!

The bus system mentioned in the HDC report is a work of fiction.

If the interchange as proposed by HDC were such a great idea, all Newcastle or Civic-bound rail commuters would alight at Wickham station and walk to Hunter Street to catch a “modern, low emission, air-conditioned bus” for the final hop into town. Commuters do not make this forced interchange today because it causes inconvenience and delay; and they won't do it (unless they have no choice) if the rail is terminated at Wickham. \$650 million for a reduced transport outcome – it doesn't make sense!

The only benefit gained by removing the rail is achieving north-south CBD connectivity. **To retain the rail and achieve connectivity by level crossings would represent much better value for money and provide a win-win for the Government** – getting the Newcastle monkey off their back by achieving connectivity while retaining the long-term sustainable transport benefits provided by rail to Newcastle.

“Green” corridor

Local cycling groups do not support the removal of the heavy rail to Newcastle for the sake what they see as an **unsafe cyclepath**:⁶⁶

“HDC has ignored the advice of local bicycle advocates and used its proposed cycleway in the rail corridor as leverage for getting the green tick of approval. No local bicycle advocate groups wanted the removal of the rail to the city to provide yet another unsafe cyclepath. There already is a cyclepath along Honeysuckle, and it would be prudent to fix the problems with that one before starting a new one. All of the new street links crossing this cyclepath will make it more dangerous to cycle than Hunter St.”

Pedestrians would prefer to walk along the Honeysuckle waterfront promenade, not through a canyon between buildings – Muggers Way!

⁶⁶ Newcastle Bike Ecology Centre, “HDC steals green tick with dangerous city cycleway”, 03/06/2009, <http://newcastlebikeecologycentre.blogspot.com/2009/06/hdc-steals-green-tick-with-dangerous.html>

Response to HDC Assessment of Transport Option

Pages 49-51 and 51-52 of the HDC report summarise their preferred transport option. Save Our Rail has responded to these points below.

“Withdrawal of the Rail Line from Newcastle Station” (HDC p49-51)

It is no surprise that Parsons Brinckerhoff would “*recommend a solution based on withdrawing the rail line to Wickham... and serving the CBD by a flexible bus system.*” As stated previously **this is the same reverse reasoning as was used in the Lower Hunter Transport Working Group reports, which were discredited previously. The CEO of PB, as stated, is one of the authors of those flawed reports.**

- ❖ *The rail line in its current location is in the wrong place to serve either the city centre or the surrounding area.*

Statements in the HDC Report regarding the location of the line in the “wrong place” have been addressed in this document.

The statement that patronage has not increased since 2003 has been addressed in this document.

- ❖ *The future city will not be serviced by a terminus at Newcastle*

Planning for the future requires a Transit Oriented Development which would retain the rail link from the outer region to Newcastle direct, and build on the existing infrastructure which has the capacity, unlike buses, to meet the predicted population increases. This is outlined in the section headed “Lower Hunter Regional Strategy”.

- ❖ *The rail line divides the precincts of the central city and causes it to operate in a dysfunctional manner.*

The measures in the Save Our Rail proposal eliminate the “divide” and give vastly improved north-south connectivity while retaining the regional links necessary for the viability of the city of Newcastle.

- ❖ *The location of the rail corridor actually reduces, rather than enhances, the accessibility of the central city.*

As above.

- ❖ *Public transport should support, as opposed to dictate, the city’s form.*

The city has grown and flourished with the rail line in place. In recent years the harbourside development has not provided the infrastructure to ensure connection with the traditional CBD across the line. **Public transport has not dictated the shape of the city, but has supported its natural growth for 150 years.** In the three key precincts as pictured in the HDC report **the rail is clearly central in supporting each of the precincts (see Figure 1 on page 29).** The city’s form results from its geography – a peninsula bounded by The Hill and The Harbour. The rail’s position is dictated by the natural boundaries, however the rail can be crossed, as it was previously at various points, prior to Honeysuckle’s development.

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- ❖ *Continuation of the rail between Newcastle and Wickham is not an optimal use of government / community resources.*

Spending \$650 million to remove infrastructure is not an optimal use of government / community resources. The financial resource could be better used in providing transport improvements regionally and in crossings to increase the north-south access in the CBD.

“Location of the [HDC Wickham] Terminus” (HDC p51-52)

- ❖ *While termination of the rail line at Broadmeadow may be possible, there is a strong view that the future CBD should remain connected by rail to the Hunter region and the Sydney metropolitan area.*

Termination of the line at Wickham disconnects Newcastle from Sydney and the Hunter.

- ❖ *A station at Wickham would be within a 400m walking distance of the major growth areas on the CBD at Honeysuckle, Civic Newcastle West and Wickham.*

Wickham and Civic Stations are just over one kilometre apart. This is not a walkable distance for most train passengers. Convenience causes rail to be a mode of choice, but this distance would be an inhibitor for the hurrying worker, the trailing toddler or the weary granny! The HDC Wickham proposal would place the terminus further to the west, increasing the walking distance and also adding a further time penalty, waiting at the traffic lights at busy Stewart Avenue. **Who is going to come to the cultural centre of Newcastle with a one kilometre hike?**

- ❖ *It is expected that a terminus at Wickham will act as a hub linking the regional road network with rail and a future CBD based bus service and generate increased usage.*

The roads in Newcastle CBD are already congested, and this will be exacerbated with the number of people reverting to car use because of the forced interchange. **Wickham will not be a “hub” it will be a snarl!**

- ❖ *A location west of Stewart Avenue opens up Stewart Avenue for increased traffic movement north south through Newcastle while providing better access to the city centre for bus and car. This option avoids the need to provide a future grade separated overpass at Stewart Avenue, which will be required in the future if the rail line is retained.*

The elevated rail as proposed by SOR is a less costly alternative to the Wickham terminus. It separates the rail and road at the busy Stewart Avenue intersection while retaining access across the line at Railway Street. The HDC proposal would block off Railway Street entirely. Elimination of the Stewart Avenue level crossing will not eliminate the heavy car traffic at the major intersection of Stewart Avenue and Hunter Street.

- ❖ *This location afforded the opportunity for a gateway to Newcastle and create a plaza entry linking the main public transport centre to the city centre and the harbour and bring all transport routes to a*

common node (rail, road and ferry) concentrating all transport modes to generate greater value up lift in the precinct.

The common transport integration exists currently – it is called Newcastle Station, where passengers can move between the three modes of transport - train, bus and ferry. If passengers want to interchange at Wickham they can do it now.

Save Our Rail's Wickham Viaduct would create an elegant Gateway Feature for the city while still providing convenience.

- ❖ *This section of the corridor is straight enough to enable a future major rail hub to be constructed including the length of platform required, the width to allow 4 platforms and the site is large enough so that it can be developed as a public domain which enables safe and easy access for passengers to interchange and use (unlike other parts of the corridor).*

A second rate solution; an expensive white elephant.

- ❖ *This location at the edge of the future CBD supports the longer term growth strategy for major commercial development in the CBD around Honeysuckle, Newcastle West and Wickham.*

A Wickham terminus would only service one third of the city. The current rail to Newcastle services all three precincts, each of which is projected to grow, especially if the University of Newcastle CBD campus proceeds.

- ❖ *Removal of the rail and opening up of the Civic precinct was consistent with the ongoing development of the Civic and cultural precinct and the relocation of University campus style facilities in the CBD.*

Universities are great generators of rail patronage. The retention of rail would provide the essential link between the Callaghan, Ourimbah (Central Coast) and CBD campuses.

SOR has addressed the issue of linking the cultural precinct in a manner consistent with NCC's vision as mentioned previously.

- ❖ *Retail function to be facilitated in the "Mall" area would not be reliant on rail but benefit from improved road access and bus services linking the rail hub to this part of the CBD.*

This is a ridiculous statement. Kellog Brown Root states, "...train travel is the most sustainable form of transport, with less pollutants and an ability to attract more users".⁶⁷

A 2004 survey of CBD business owners by the Newcastle Alliance found two-thirds nominated parking as a serious problem, about twice the response rate of any other problem.⁶⁸ **Encouraging more car and bus use over rail would increase traffic problems and worsen the parking shortage.**

⁶⁷ Kellog Brown Root, "Central Newcastle Transport Options Planning Study" Commissioned by NSW Government, Oct 2003, p5.13

⁶⁸ Dr Bruce McFarling (Lecturer in Economics), "Public Transport Trust Could Ensure Rail Profit", Newcastle Herald, 11/12/04

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- ❖ *The greatest potential for urban growth and renewal is located around the proposed new station site in the Wickham area.*

This is no reason to terminate the rail line at Wickham. Removing rail from Civic and Newcastle would reduce growth in those centres. **It is at odds with the proposal to re-locate the University of Newcastle and the legal precinct at Civic, and would hamper the GPT development.**

- ❖ *Is very close to the crossroads of the east / west regional route with the north / south regional access routes, making it the regional hub for bus, coach, car passenger drop off/collection, and park'n'ride and is accessible to the foreshore and potential future ferry services.*

Refer to earlier comment about a traffic snarl. The hub already exists at Newcastle, accessible to the foreshore, ferry and beaches. As stated previously, **the option to interchange at Wickham exists now.**

- ❖ *It has the potential to serve business commuters, residents and the tourism and recreation sectors well.*

How is this different to what is there now?

- ❖ *The site has the potential to house ancillary uses that will enhance performance of the terminal such as retail, office, service centre and passenger facilities.*

Newcastle Station, if fully utilised as proposed by SOR, could provide for the above. An improved (non-terminus) Wickham Station could equally provide this.

- ❖ *Estimated travel times (based on current journey data) would result in minimal travel time disruptions for regional commuters and have minimal impact/loss as a result of modal change.*

The journey times as proposed by HDC are a misrepresentation. As stated previously a major inconvenience and trip delay would result from any forced interchange, resulting in patronage loss. **Newcastle needs the direct train service currently available.**

- ❖ *Shortening the Newcastle branch line will enable the removal of up to three level crossings (Merewether Street, Stewart Avenue and Railway Street which is consistent with NSW policy of reducing the number of level crossings in New South Wales) and provides a safer environment as the cities pedestrian and cycling population grows.*

This is not a minor “shortening” of the line, but the destruction of a well used rail infrastructure with the removal of the busiest and fourth busiest stations in the region.

This would be a costly error of planning. Stewart Avenue and Railway Street crossings could be eliminated with the SOR viaduct proposal at much less monetary cost and no social cost.

- ❖ *This location has the potential to reduce maintenance costs on the network into the future.*

The most expensive maintenance cost on the Newcastle Line is in provision of terminating facilities at Newcastle Station. The same costs would transfer to any

new terminus. Any minor operating cost savings are dwarfed by the \$650 million capital expenditure for the HDC Wickham Terminus. Loss of revenue is not accounted for, and provision of additional buses is also not accounted for.

- ❖ *On a comparative cost basis this option is agreed to be the most cost effective of the options considered (past and present) and still provides rail services to a growing Newcastle CBD.*

This is totally rejected. The economic assessment undertaken for HDC is “flawed, biased and misrepresented”. A fair analysis would not reach the conclusions above.

Conclusion

Save Our Rail accepts that there is a need for action to address the neglected state of parts of the Newcastle CBD.

The illogical assertion that the existence of the rail line in the centre of the town is the reason for the decline of Newcastle as the major retail centre is rejected. There are various reasons for the changes in shopping patterns, which are largely based around the rise in car use and the proliferation of attractive alternative shopping venues, with free parking. The Newcastle earthquake was a factor in changing habits and establishing new loyalties.

Some of the neglect in the Newcastle CBD has been attributable to uncertainty generated by proposals to remove the city’s major public transport facility, the rail line, over the past decade. Developers react negatively to such uncertainty and there has been a lack of public investment for the same reason.

Rail direct to the heart of the city, forming a link to the beach and harbour is an asset, and is vital to any revival of Newcastle as a thriving community. This has been stated by sustainability authorities, including Prof. Peter Newman. **The removal of the rail line** could have short term benefit to some, but **would cause long term disadvantage to many and could ultimately contribute to the city becoming derelict with detriment to the entire Hunter Region.**

The HDC report has applied inaccurate data from the discredited Lower Hunter Transport Working Group reports referred to it by consultants, Parsons Brinckerhoff. The conclusions drawn by Prof Graham Currie in reviewing those reports in 2005 can equally be applied to the 2009 HDC report; that **it uses biased, flawed and misrepresented advice.**

The Hunter Development Corporation has adopted a predetermined position as in its original “approved scheme” which is to cut the Newcastle Rail Line. **It uses all means possible to justify this aim, including misrepresentation, bias, distortion and omission of facts.**

There is a problem of access over the rail line, in part created by the development of Honeysuckle without the provision of suitable crossings. Indeed prior to and in the process of this redevelopment existing level crossings were removed. These need to be replaced to open up the potential of the city. This need has been expressed by many community organisations.

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The University of Newcastle has an interest in expanding its campus in the city, and this would be a catalyst for renewal. This could and should be achieved without interfering with the current provision of rail transport; in fact rail is a desirable form of transport for students, especially in conjunction with bicycles. **The University's possible expansion has been falsely cited as being dependent on the removal of the rail by HDC.**

There is a need for upgraded legal facilities, the Federal and State courts being inadequate for their current level of use. This need has been seized upon by HDC as a reason to move the whole legal precinct to the Civic area, and again, as with the University, it is being put forward that this would be contingent on the removal of the rail line. **The legal fraternity has indicated that the preferred site for their redevelopment is in the current location, in the east end, and there does not seem to be any valid reason that in providing for these needs the rail has any relevance.**

The HDC report Cost Benefit Analysis is flawed, with inaccurate calculations being used to achieve a supposed benefit in cutting the rail line and claiming that the University campus cannot proceed unless that happens. The University campus benefit allows HDC to claim their proposal gives a \$163 million net benefit when without the University their proposal results in a \$374 million net loss. **HDC makes what is really a deficit appear to be a benefit.**

However, if the University CBD campus is included on the benefit side of both options (cut the rail and keep the rail) – a scenario incorrectly omitted by HDC – then retaining the rail emerges as the far superior option in cost benefit terms (by almost \$200 million more on Net Present Value). Keeping the rail is the economically superior choice.

The report then goes on to list “non-quantifiable” benefits to **enhance the case for cutting the line, but omits any such benefits in retaining the rail**, some of which include environmental and social benefits. There is no mention of the need for sustainable transport with “peak oil” looming nor of the need to consider climate change.

The report indicates that train passengers coming to Newcastle would be transferred to buses at Wickham. The fact that a train load of passengers will not fit into a bus is ignored. **Save Our Rail has previously demonstrated that it is highly impractical to attempt to transfer a train load onto buses. The SOR “Superior Bus” demonstration, in 2005, indicated there would be considerable delay, inconvenience and frustration if passengers had to interchange in this fashion.** The HDC report does not factor in any costing for additional bus services so the normal “town bus” along Hunter Street would need to be accessed by all Newcastle passengers.

Save Our Rail lists many disadvantages in a forced interchange at Wickham including the impact on disabled and frail aged passengers and delay for commuters. **There would be an increase in traffic and a shortfall in parking** because of the shift to private car use resulting from the transfer inconvenience.

The report states that the rail is in the “wrong” position. We contend that it is in the ideal position to service the three areas shown on the HDC map.⁶⁹ **The existing stations coincide with the centres of the three precincts identified – New Business, Cultural and Tourist / Residential / Heritage.** They would be enhanced by the SOR proposal to link the cultural centre at Civic Station and by the provision of the Harbourlink Station near the Mall.

⁶⁹ The HDC map is reproduced by Save Our Rail in Figure 1 on page 29; the original map was included by HDC in their report: “Newcastle City Centre Renewal Report to NSW Government”, March 2009, p2

The Lower Hunter Regional Strategy emphasises Newcastle’s role as the Major Regional city. Studies indicate this would be compromised if the Newcastle rail link is severed. Many commuters from the nearby cities of Lake Macquarie and Maitland work in the Newcastle CBD, and with large new developments occurring in these areas it will be increasingly important to retain this valuable mass transit link.

The wider Hunter Community has consistently rejected proposals to cut the Newcastle Rail Line. Save Our Rail acts for those in the community who need and use train transport. We say *“improve not remove”*, and we therefore reject this report which advocates for the destruction of a valuable piece of infrastructure.

The HDC report does not have adequate reasons for any removal of the direct heavy rail into Newcastle, therefore we urge the State Government to ignore this flawed report and to fully examine other options for Newcastle’s improvement.

The proposals put forward by Save Our Rail for crossings, a viaduct and other improvements would solve connectivity problems with a greater net benefit to the community than a rail cut. We recommend the December 2008 Save Our Rail proposal: *“Newcastle – Towards a Sustainable and Vibrant City; a Proposal for CBD Integration”*.

“SAVE OUR RAIL” and “IMPROVE NOT REMOVE”